

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 578. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1879.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

THE DUKE'S CHILDREN.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XXIII. FRANK TREGEAR WANTS A FRIEND.

SIX or seven weeks had passed since Tregear had made his communication to the duke, and during that time he had heard not a word about the girl he loved. He knew, indeed, that she was at The Horns, and probably had reason to suppose that she was being guarded there, as it were, out of his reach. This did not surprise him; nor did he regard it as a hardship. It was to be expected that she should be kept out of his sight. But this was a state of things to which, as he thought, there should not be more than a moderate amount of submission. Six weeks was not a very long period, but it was perhaps long enough for evincing that respect which he owed to the young lady's father. Something must be done some day. How could he expect her to be true to him unless he took some means of showing himself to be true to her?

In these days he did not live very much with her brother. He not only disliked, but distrusted Major Tifto, and had so expressed himself as to give rise to angry words. Silverbridge had said that he knew how to take care of himself. Tregear had replied that he had his doubts on that matter. Then the Member of Parliament had declared that at any rate he did not intend to be taken care of by Frank Tregear! In such a state of things it was not possible that there should be any close confidence as to Lady Mary. Nor does it often come to pass that the brother is the confidant of the sister's lover.

Brothers hardly like their sisters to have lovers, though they are often well satisfied that their sisters should find husbands. Tregear's want of rank and wealth added something to this feeling in the mind of this brother; so that Silverbridge, though he felt himself to be deterred by friendship from any open opposition, still was almost inimical. "It won't do, you know," he had said to his brother Gerald, shaking his head.

Tregear, however, was determined to be active in the matter, to make some effort, to speak to somebody. But how to make an effort—and to whom should he speak? Thinking of all this he remembered that Mrs. Finn had sent for him and had told him to go with his love story to the duke. She had been almost severe with him—but after the interview was over, he had felt that she had acted well and wisely. He therefore determined that he would go to Mrs. Finn.

She had as yet received no answer from the duke, though nearly a fortnight had elapsed since she had written her letter. During that time she had become very angry. She felt that he was not treating her as a gentleman should treat a lady, and certainly not as the husband of her late friend should have treated the friend of his late wife. She had a proud consciousness of having behaved well to the Pallisers, and now this head of the Pallisers was rewarding her by evil treatment. She had been generous; he was ungenerous. She had been honest—he was deficient even in that honesty for which she had given him credit. And she had been unable to obtain any of that consolation which could have come to her from talking of her wrongs. She could not

complain to her husband, because there were reasons which made it essential that her husband should not quarrel with the duke. She was hot with indignation at the very moment in which Tregear was announced.

He began by apologising for his intrusion, and she of course assured him that he was welcome. "After the liberty which I took with you, Mr. Tregear, I am only too well pleased that you should come and see me."

"I am afraid," he said, "that I was a little rough."

"A little warm—but that was to be expected. A gentleman never likes to be interfered with on such a matter."

"The position was and is difficult, Mrs. Finn."

"And I am bound to acknowledge the very ready way in which you did what I asked you to do."

"And now, Mrs. Finn, what is to come next?"

"Ah!"

"Something must be done! You know of course that the duke did not receive me with any great favour."

"I did not suppose he would."

"Nor did I. Of course he would object to such a marriage. But a man in these days cannot dictate to his daughter what husband she should marry."

"Perhaps he can dictate to her what husband she shall not marry."

"Hardly that. He may put impediments in the way; and the duke will do so. But if I am happy enough to have won the affections of his daughter—so as to make it essential to her happiness that she should become my wife—he will give way."

"What am I to say, Mr. Tregear?"

"Just what you think."

"Why should I be made to say what I think on so delicate a matter? Or of what use would be my thoughts? Remember how far I am removed from her."

"You are his friend."

"Not at all! No one less so!" As she said this she could not hinder the colour from coming into her face. "I was her friend—Lady Glencora's; but with the death of my friend there was an end of all that."

"You were staying with him—at his request. You told me so yourself."

"I shall never stay with him again. But all that, Mr. Tregear, is of no matter. I do not mean to say a word against him

—not a word. But if you wish to interest anyone as being the duke's friend, then I can assure you I am the last person in London to whom you should come. I know no one to whom the duke is likely to entertain feelings so little kind as towards me." This she said in a peculiarly solemn way which startled Tregear. But before he could answer her a servant entered the room with a letter. She recognised at once the duke's handwriting. Here was the answer for which she had been so long waiting in silent expectation! She could not keep it unread till he was gone. "Will you allow me a moment?" she whispered, and then she opened the envelope. As she read the few words her eyes became laden with tears. They quite sufficed to relieve the injured pride which had sat so heavy at her heart. "I believe I did you a wrong, and therefore I ask your pardon!" It was so like what she had believed the man to be! She could not be longer angry with him. And yet the very last words she had spoken were words complaining of his conduct. "This is from the duke," she said, putting the letter back into its envelope.

"Oh, indeed."

"It is odd that it should have come while you were here."

"Is it—is it—about Lady Mary?"

"No; at least, not directly. I perhaps spoke more harshly about him than I should have done. The truth is I had expected a line from him, and it had not come. Now it is here; but I do not suppose I shall ever see much of him. My intimacy was with her. But I would not wish you to remember what I said just now, if—if—"

"If what, Mrs. Finn? You mean, perhaps, if I should ever be allowed to call myself his son-in-law. It may seem to you to be arrogant, but it is an honour which I expect to win."

"Faint heart—you know, Mr. Tregear."

"Exactly. One has to tell oneself that very often. You will help me?"

"Certainly not," she said, as though she were much startled. "How can I help you?"

"By telling me what I should do. I suppose if I were to go down to Richmond I should not be admitted."

"If you ask me, I think not; not to see Lady Mary. Lady Cantrip would perhaps see you."

"She is acting the part of—duenna."

"As I should do also, if Lady Mary were staying with me. You don't suppose that if she were here I would let her see you in my house without her father's leave?"

"I suppose not."

"Certainly not; and therefore I conceive that Lady Cantrip will not do so either."

"I wish she were here."

"It would be of no use. I should be a dragon in guarding her."

"I wish you would let me feel that you were like a sister to me in this matter."

"But I am not your sister, nor yet your aunt, nor yet your grandmother. What I mean is that I cannot be on your side."

"Can you not?"

"No, Mr. Tregear. Think how long I have known these other people."

"But just now you said that he was your enemy."

"I did say so; but as I have unsaid it since, you as a gentleman will not remember my words. At any rate, I cannot help you in this."

"I shall write to her."

"It can be nothing to me. If you write she will show your letter either to her father or to Lady Cantrip."

"But she will read it first."

"I cannot tell how that may be. In fact, I am the very last person in the world to whom you should come for assistance in this matter. If I gave any assistance to anybody I should be bound to give it to the duke."

"I cannot understand that, Mrs. Finn."

"Nor can I explain it, but it would be so. I shall always be very glad to see you, and I do feel that we ought to be friends—because I took such a liberty with you. But in this matter I cannot help you."

When she said this he had to take his leave. It was impossible that he should further press his case upon her, though he would have been very glad to extract from her some kindly word. It is such a help in a difficulty to have somebody who will express even a hope that the difficulty is perhaps not invincible! He had no one to comfort him in this matter. There was one dear friend—as a friend dearer than any other—to whom he might go, and who would after some fashion bid him prosper. Mabel would encourage him. She had said that she would do so. But in making that promise she had told him that Romeo would not

have spoken of his love for Juliet to Rosalind, whom he had loved before he saw Juliet. No doubt she had gone on to tell him that he might come to her and talk freely of his love for Lady Mary—but after what had been said before, he felt that he could not do so without leaving a sting behind. When a man's love goes well with him—so well as to be in some degree oppressive to him even by its prosperity—when the young lady has jumped into his arms, and the father and the mother have been quite willing, then he wants no confidant. He does not care to speak very much of the matter which among his friends is apt to become a subject for railly. When you call a man Benedick he does not come to you with ecstatic descriptions of the beauty and the wit of his Beatrice. But no one was likely to call him Benedick in reference to Lady Mary.

In spite of his manner, in spite of his apparent self-sufficiency, this man was very soft within. Less than two years back he had been willing to sacrifice all the world for his cousin Mabel, and his cousin Mabel had told him that he was wrong. "It does not pay to sacrifice the world for love." So cousin Mabel had said, and had added something as to its being necessary that she should marry a rich man, and expedient that he should marry a rich woman. He had thought much about it, and had declared to himself that on no account would he marry a woman for her money. Then he had encountered Lady Mary Palliser. There had been no doubt, no resolution after that, no thinking about it; but downright love. There was nothing left of real regret for his cousin in his bosom. She had been right. That love had been impossible. But this would be possible—ah, so deliciously possible—if only her father and mother would assist! The mother, imprudent in this as in all things, had assented. The reader knows the rest.

It was in every way possible. "She will have money enough," the duchess had said, "if only her father can be brought to give it you." So Tregear had set his heart upon it, and had said to himself that the thing was to be done. Then his friend the duchess had died, and the real difficulties had commenced. From that day he had not seen his love, or heard from her. How was he to know whether she would be true to him? And where was he to seek for

that sympathy which he felt to be so necessary to him? A wild idea had come into his head that Mrs. Finn would be his friend; but she had repudiated him. He went straight home, and at once wrote to the girl. The letter was a simple love-letter, and as such need not to be given here. In what sweetest language he could find he assured her that even though he should never be allowed to see her or to hear from her, that still he should cling to her. And then he added this passage: "If your love for me be what I think it to be, no one can have a right to keep us apart. Pray be sure that I shall not change. If you change let me know it—but I shall as soon expect the heavens to fall."

CHAPTER XXIV. SHE MUST BE MADE TO OBEY.

LADY MARY PALLISER down at The Horns had as much liberty allowed to her as is usually given to young ladies in these very free days. There was indeed no restriction placed upon her at all. Had Tregear gone down to Richmond and asked for the young lady, and had Lady Cantrip at the time been out, and the young lady at home, it would have depended altogether upon the young lady whether she would have seen her lover or not. Nevertheless Lady Cantrip kept her eyes open, and when the letter came from Tregear she was aware that the letter had come. But the letter found its way into Lady Mary's hands and was read in the seclusion of her own bedroom. "I wonder whether you would mind reading that," she said, very shortly afterwards, to Lady Cantrip. "What answer ought I to make?"

"Do you think any answer ought to be made, my dear?"

"Oh, yes; I must answer him."

"Would your papa wish it?"

"I told papa that I would not promise not to write to him. I think I told him that he should see any letters that there were. But if I show them to you, I suppose that will do as well."

"You had better keep your word to him absolutely."

"I am not afraid of doing so, if you mean that. I cannot bear to give him pain, but this is a matter in which I mean to have my own way."

"Mean to have your own way!" said Lady Cantrip, much surprised by the determined tone of the young lady.

"Certainly I do. I want you to understand so much! I suppose papa can keep

us from marrying for ever and ever if he pleases, but he never will make me say that I will give up Mr. Tregear. And if he does not yield I shall think him cruel. Why should he wish to make me unhappy all my life?"

"He certainly does not wish that, my dear."

"But he will do it."

"I cannot go against your father, Mary."

"No, I suppose not. I shall write to Mr. Tregear, and then I will show you what I have written. Papa shall see it too if he pleases. I will do nothing secret, but I will never give up Mr. Tregear."

Lord Cantrip came down to Richmond that evening, and his wife told him that in her opinion it would be best that the duke should allow the young people to marry, and should give them money enough to live upon. "Is not that a strong order?" asked the earl. The countess acknowledged that it was a "strong order," but suggested that for the happiness of them all it might as well be done at first as at last.

The next morning Lady Mary showed her a copy of the reply which she had already sent to her lover.

"DEAR FRANK,—You may be quite sure that I shall never give you up. I will not write more at present because papa does not wish me to do so. I shall show papa your letter and my answer. Your own most affectionate

"MARY."

"Has it gone?" asked the countess.

"I put it myself into the pillar letter-box." Then Lady Cantrip felt that she had to deal with a very self-willed young lady indeed.

That afternoon Lady Cantrip asked Lady Mary whether she might be allowed to take the two letters up to town with the express purpose of showing them to the duke. "Oh, yes," said Mary. "I think it would be so much the best. Give papa my kindest love, and tell him, from me, that if he wants to make his poor little girl happy he will forgive her and be kind to her in all this." Then the countess made some attempt to argue the matter. There were proprieties! High rank might be a blessing or might be the reverse—as people thought of it; but all men acknowledged that much was due to it. "Noblesse oblige." It was often the case in life that women were called upon by circumstances to sacrifice their inclinations! What right had a gentleman to talk

of marriage who had no means? These things she said and very many more, but it was to no purpose. The young lady asserted that as the gentleman was a gentleman there need be no question as to rank, and that in regard to money there need be no difficulty if one of them had sufficient. "But you have none but what your father may give you," said Lady Cantrip. "Papa can give it us without any trouble," said Lady Mary. This child had a clear idea of what she thought to be her own rights. Being the child of rich parents she had the right to money. Being a woman, she had a right to a husband. Having been born free she had a right to choose one for herself. Having had a man's love given to her she had a right to keep it. "One doesn't know which she is most like, her father or her mother," Lady Cantrip said afterwards to her husband. "She has his cool determination, and her hot-headed obstinacy."

She did show the letters to the duke, and, in answer to a word or two from him, explained that she could not take upon herself to debar her guest from the use of the post. "But she will write nothing without letting you know it."

"She ought to write nothing at all."

"What she feels is much worse than what she writes."

"If there were no intercourse she would forget him."

"Ah! I don't know," said the countess sorrowfully. "I thought so once."

"All children are determined as long as they are allowed to have their own way."

"I mean to say that it is the nature of her character to be obstinate. Most girls are prone to yield. They have not character enough to stand against opposition. I am not speaking now only of affairs like this. It would be the same with her in anything. Have you not always found it so?"

Then he had to acknowledge to himself that he had never found out anything in reference to his daughter's character. She had been properly educated; at least, he hoped so. He had seen her grow up, pretty, sweet, affectionate, always obedient to him; the most charming plaything in the world on the few occasions in which he had allowed himself to play, but as to her actual disposition, he had never taken any trouble to inform himself. She had been left to her mother—as other girls are left. And his sons had been left to their tutors. And now he had no

control over any of them. "She must be made to obey like others," he said at last, speaking through his teeth.

There was something in this which almost frightened Lady Cantrip. She could not bear to hear him say that the girl must be made to yield, with that spirit of despotic power under which women were restrained in years now passed. If she could have spoken her own mind it would have been to this effect: "Let us do what we can to lead her away from this desire of hers; and in order that we may do so, let us tell her that her marriage with Mr. Tregear is out of the question. But if we do not succeed—say in the course of the next twelve months—let us give way. Let us make it a matter of joy that the young man himself is so acceptable and well-behaved." That was her idea, and with that she would have indoctrined the duke had she been able. But his was different. "She must be made to obey," he said. And, as he said it, he seemed to be indifferent as to the sorrow which such enforced obedience might bring upon his child. In answer to this she could only shake her head. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you think we ought to yield?"

"Not at once, certainly."

"But at last?"

"What can you do, duke? If she be as firm as you, can you bear to see her pine away in her misery!"

"Girls do not do like that," he said.

"Girls, like men, are very different. They generally will yield to external influences. English girls, though they become the most loving wives in the world, do not generally become so riven by an attachment as to become deep sufferers when it is disallowed. But here, I fear, we have to deal with one who will suffer after this fashion."

"Why should she not be like others?"

"It may be so. We will try. But you see what she says in her letter to him. She writes as though your authority were to be nothing in that matter of giving up. In all that she says to me there is the same spirit. If she is firm, duke, you must yield."

"Never! She shall never marry him with my sanction."

There was nothing more to be said, and Lady Cantrip went her way. But the duke, though he could say nothing more, continued to think of it hour after hour. He went down to the House of Lords to listen to a debate in which it was intended to

cover the ministers with heavy disgrace. But the duke would not listen even to his own friends. He could listen to nothing as he thought of the condition of his children.

He had been asked whether he could bear to see his girl suffer, as though he were indifferent to the sufferings of his child. Did he not know of himself that there was no father who would do more for the welfare of his daughter? Was he not sure of the tenderness of his own heart? In all that he was doing was he governed by anything but a sense of duty? Was it personal pride or love of personal aggrandisement? He thought that he could assure himself that he was open to no such charge. Would he not die for her—or for them—if he could so serve them? Surely this woman had accused him most wrongfully when she had intimated that he could see his girl suffer without caring for it. In his indignation he determined—for a while—that he would remove her from the custody of Lady Cantrip. But then, where should he place her? He was aware that his own house would be like a grave to a girl just fit to come out into the world. In this coming autumn she must go somewhere—with someone. He himself, in his present frame of mind, would be but a sorry travelling companion.

Lady Cantrip had said that the best hope of escape would lie in the prospect of another lover. The prescription was disagreeable, but it had availed in the case of his own wife. Before he had ever seen her as Lady Glencora McCloskie she had been desirous of giving herself and all her wealth to one Burgo Fitzgerald, who had been altogether unworthy. The duke could remember well how a certain old Lady Midlothian had first hinted to him that Lady Glencora's property was very large, and had then added that the young lady herself was very beautiful. And he could remember how his uncle, the late duke, who had seldom taken much trouble in merely human affairs, had said a word or two: "I have heard a whisper about you and Lady Glencora McCloskie; nothing could be better." The result had been undoubtedly good. His Cora and all her money had been saved from a worthless spendthrift. He had found a wife who, he now thought, had made him happy. And she had found at any rate a respectable husband. The idea when picked to pieces is not a nice idea. "Let us look out for a husband for this girl, so that we may get

her married—out of the way of her lover." It is not nice. But it had succeeded in one case, and why should it not succeed in another?

But how was it to be done? Who should do it? Whom should he select to play the part which he had undertaken in that other arrangement? No worse person could be found than himself for managing such an affair. When the idea had first been raised he had thought that Lady Cantrip would do it all; but now he was angry with Lady Cantrip.

How was it to be done? How should it be commenced? How had it been commenced in his own case? He did not in the least know how he had been chosen. Was it possible that his uncle, who was the proudest man in England, should have condescended to make a bargain with an old dowager whom everybody had despised? And in what way had he been selected? No doubt he had been known to be the heir-apparent to a dukedom and to ducal revenues. In his case old Lady Midlothian had begun the matter with him. It occurred to him that in royal marriages such beginnings are quite common.

But who should be the happy man? Then he began to count up the requisite attributes. He must be of high rank, and an eldest son, and the possessor of, or the heir to, a good estate. He did despise himself when he found that he put these things first—as a matter of course. Nevertheless he did put them first. He was ejecting this other man because he possessed none of these attributes. He hurried himself on to add that the man must be of good character, and such as a young girl might learn to love. But yet he was aware that he added these things for his conscience's sake. Tregear's character was good, and certainly the girl loved him. But was it not clear, to all who knew anything of such matters, that Mr. Francis Tregear should not have dared even to think of marrying the daughter of the Duke of Omnium?

Who should be the happy man? There were so many who evidently were unfit. Young Lord Percival was heir to a ruined estate and a beggared peerage. Lord Glasslough was odious to all men. There were three or four others of whom he thought that he knew some fatal objection. But when he remembered Lord Popplecourt there seemed to be no objection which need be fatal.

Lord Popplecourt was a young peer

whose father had died two years since and whose estates were large and unembarrassed. The late lord, who had been a Whig of the old fashion, had been the duke's friend. They had been at Oxford and in the House of Commons together, and Lord Popplecourt had always been staunch to his party. As to the son, the duke remembered to have heard lately that he was not given to waste his money. He drove a coach about London a good deal, but had not as yet done anything very foolish. He had taken his degree at Oxford, thereby showing himself to be better than Silverbridge. He had also taken his seat in the House of Lords and had once opened his mouth. He had not indeed appeared often again; but at Lord Popplecourt's age much legislation is not to be expected from a young peer. Then he thought of the man's appearance. Popplecourt was not specially attractive, whereas Tregear was a very handsome man. But so also had been Burgo Fitzgerald—almost abnormally beautiful; while he, Plantagenet Palliser, as he was then, had been quite as insignificant in appearance as Lord Popplecourt.

Lord Popplecourt might possibly do. But then how should the matter be spoken of to the young man? After all, would it not be best that he should trust Lady Cantrip?

HORTENSE MANCINI.

AMONG the innumerable tribulations, political and personal, to which Cardinal Mazarin was exposed in the course of his long and eventful career, none, perhaps, caused him greater anxiety than the difficulty of gratifying his ambition by procuring advantageous alliances for his seven nieces. Six of these he succeeded in establishing during his lifetime; the marriage of the youngest, Marie Anne Mancini, with the Duke of Bouillon, not having been solemnized until after his death. As might be expected from the character of Mazarin, the inclinations of the ladies were seldom, if ever, consulted in these matrimonial arrangements, and it is therefore not surprising that, although invariably tending to consolidate the power and promote the interests of the astute statesman, the unions thus contracted proved in the majority of instances anything but a source of happiness to the parties principally concerned. In no case,

however, was the result of his match-making propensities more singularly infelicitous than in that of the youngest but one of his nieces, the sprightly and beautiful Hortense, whose adventures, as recorded partly by herself and partly by her contemporaries, read almost like a novel.

Born in Rome, in 1643, she remained there with her father, Lorenzo Mancini, until she had attained her tenth year, when by desire of her mother, then residing in Paris, she was conducted thither in 1653, and placed, together with her sister Marie, in a convent at Chaillot. Two years later we find them installed in the Hôtel Mazarin, completing their education under the superintendence of their governess, Madame de Venelle, to whose care their little sister Marie Anne, recently arrived from Rome, was also entrusted. The latter, whose natural precocity had found especial favour in the eyes of the cardinal, was in constant correspondence with him during his absence from the court, and unconsciously furnished him with information respecting her sisters, of whom she complained that they treated her like a child, and sent her away when they wished to talk secrets. Mazarin, who was at that time much embarrassed by the evident partiality of the young Louis the Fourteenth for his niece Marie, and who imagined, not without reason, Hortense to be her confidante, encouraged his correspondent to give him the minutest details concerning both; and in a letter to the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, dated from Saint Jean de Luz, August 9, 1659, expressed as follows his dissatisfaction with the subject of our notice, naturally without betraying his informant: "I will tell you in confidence what I hear of Hortense; that her conduct is not what it should be, and that she follows the example of her sister (Marie), and pays no attention to those in authority over her. I beg of you, as if it came from yourself, to reprimand her severely, after having ascertained from Madame de Venelle how far she is to blame."

Even at this early period the beauty and grace of Hortense were the admiration of all who beheld her; in April, 1653, she was chosen as the representative of the Goddess of Music in the ballet of *Thétis et Pélee*; and, at a ball given by the king's brother Philip at the Palais Royal in the same year, is described by Scarron as having captivated her future husband,

Armand de la Meilleraye, who had lately succeeded his father as Grand Master of the artillery.

Celui de qui reçoit la loi
La dernière raison du roi,
En expression moins fleurie,
C'est-à-dire l'artillerie,
S'y soutint, fit des temps, chassa,
S'éleva, coula, bref dansa
Avec l'aimable Transalpine
Mancini, Gallicé Mancine,
Qui, dit-on, perd bientôt son nom ;
Son esprit est de grand renom :
Ses yeux avec des traits d'ébène
Font souvent blessure inhumaine ;
Ses traits bruns avec art tirés
Font grand mal s'ils ne sont parés.

Court gossip, therefore, had already coupled their names together, but Mazarin had not yet made up his mind; the suitors for the hand of his niece were legion, and her extreme youth gave him ample leisure for reflection. Charles the Second, then a crownless wanderer, twice authorised proposals to be made in his name, and was twice refused; a want of foresight on the part of the cardinal for which, when the royal exile had been restored to his kingdom, he endeavoured to atone by suggesting through the king's mother, Henrietta Maria, a renewal of the negotiations, but without success. Other candidates were the Prince, afterwards King, of Portugal, the Duke of Savoy, and the Prince of Courtenay. Their respective pretensions were carefully weighed and finally rejected by the wily Italian, who, after several months' indecision, finding his end approaching, at length fixed his choice on the son of his old friend the Marshal de la Meilleraye,* sole heir to his father's large fortune and lucrative state offices, on condition of his assuming the name of Mazarin. Thus, at the death of her uncle in 1661, the newly-married duchess found herself in possession of a dowry amounting to no less than twenty-eight millions of livres, and became, to use her own words, "the richest heiress and the unhappiest woman in Christendom." The latter statement, however, in after days perfectly justifiable, could scarcely have applied to the commencement of their union, if the description given of her husband by Saint Simon be correct. "I have been told by his contemporaries," he says, "that no one was

wittier, better informed, or more agreeable in society; he was brave, learned, liberal in expenditure, affable and courteous in manner, and an especial favourite with the king." An equally graphic portrait of Hortense at this period of her life has been traced by Madame de La Fayette in her charming History of Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans: "She was not only the handsomest of the cardinal's nieces, she was also one of the most perfect beauties of the court. Wit alone was wanting to give her the vivacity which would have completed the charm; but this defect was esteemed a quality by many, who considered her languishing air an additional claim to their admiration."

It is, therefore, but fair to suppose that the early days of their marriage were tolerably happy; nor can it be doubted that Armand was at that time passionately enamoured of his lovely bride. Long before he had refused the hand of her sister Olympe (afterwards Countess of Soissons) offered him by Mazarin, declaring that he preferred Hortense to any woman in the world, and would be content if he could only make her his wife to die three months after. The sudden acquisition, however, of so enormous a fortune, added to the responsibility entailed upon him by the important posts committed to his charge, appear, as his father had long ago foreseen they would, to have overtasked his mental faculties; while a feeling of jealousy, occasioned by the frequent visits paid to his wife by the young king, gradually took possession of his mind, and caused him to regard with suspicion even the most insignificant tribute of homage offered to her beauty. Paris and the court became odious to him, and he imagined no better method of ensuring Hortense's fidelity than that of transporting her from place to place, from one seat of government to another, without previously informing her of the route he intended taking. The fatigue of these constant migrations, and the change in her husband's conduct towards her, affected both her health and spirits; and such was his disregard of her personal comfort, that on one occasion she was reduced to give birth to a child in a wayside inn. Nor was this exaggerated and unfounded jealousy the only symptom of eccentricity manifested by him; religious scruples, pushed to the extreme, forbade him to endure the sight of an undraped statue or picture; and he was observed one day,

* The marshal, according to Saint-Simon, although a connection of Cardinal Richelieu, had little to boast of in the way of ancestry; one of his progenitors having been an apothecary, and another a porter, from which the family name La Porte was said to be derived.

hammer and paint-brush in hand, stalking about the magnificent gallery left him by the cardinal, and mutilating the rarest marbles and the masterpieces of Titian and Correggio with pitiless zeal. Hearing of this the king sent Colbert to remonstrate with him; and the minister, who well knew the value of these chefs d'œuvre, did what he could to save the remainder. Louis the Fourteenth, however, who had more than once borrowed money from the duke, did not judge it expedient to interfere further, contenting himself, on one of his visits to the Louvre, with saying to Perroult, pointing to a hammer in a corner of the room: "I see there a weapon which Monsieur de Mazarin knows how to handle!"

Unfortunately for his wife and heirs this wholesale reformer was still held to be sufficiently sane to manage his affairs; the vagaries in which he indulged—and they were innumerable—being accompanied by a certain polished gravity of demeanour and sobriety of language incompatible, according to Saint-Simon, with mental incapacity. The favour, moreover, constantly shown him by the king was in itself a safeguard against any open display of ridicule on the part of the courtiers; although he occasionally presumed on his royal master's good-nature so far as to exhort him to change his mode of life, declaring that he had been commanded by the angel Gabriel to warn him of impending misfortune, unless he abandoned all intercourse with Mademoiselle de La Vallière. One of his weaknesses was a fondness for lawsuits, nearly three hundred of which, the Abbé de Choisy tells us, he lost, and consoled himself by saying that as they were all more or less connected with the fortune bequeathed to him by the cardinal, which was probably ill-gotten, there was no great harm done; whereas every cause gained by him was a proof that he had right on his side, and his conscience was satisfied. His domestics were chosen, not according to their fitness for a particular post, but by lot; as chance willed it, the lackey took the place of steward, and the secretary—as in the farce of *Fish out of Water*—became cook. Each was strictly enjoined to bear in mind that whatever happened was the will of Providence, and, as such, was to be respected—nay, on one occasion, when a fire broke out in the Hôtel Mazarin, and the affrighted servants sought to extinguish it, he rebuked them severely for interfer-

ing with the divine pleasure, and dismissed them all.

Hortense, meanwhile, amused herself, during the short intervals of leisure allowed her by the capricious duke, by writing her memoirs,* a work abounding in curious details relating to her everyday life. That she was at first sincerely attached to her husband there can be little doubt, for she expressly tells us that "her greatest pleasure was to be with him;" and adds that she would willingly have shared his passion for locomotion had he only treated her kindly. "I could not," she says, "even speak to a servant without his being instantly discharged; and if I received a visit twice from the same person, he was never admitted into the house again. In short, I was completely isolated from all the world." She might have borne these annoyances had not her toilette—a woman's especial pride—been meddled with, and her diamonds surreptitiously removed from her dressing-case. This was more than she could endure, and, declaring that she would no longer submit to such unheard-of tyranny, she notified to her husband's family her intention of seeking refuge in the Abbey of Chelles, and carried her project into execution. M. de Mazarin, who had profited by her departure to start on a voyage of inspection through Alsace, in his capacity of governor of the province, repaired on his return to Chelles; and, dissatisfied with the friendly sympathy shown by the abbess to his wife, obtained permission from the king to transfer her to the convent of the Filles de Sainte-Marie de la Bastille, whither she was conducted under military escort.

In this retreat she contracted an intimacy with the beautiful and lively Sidonie de Lenoncourt, Marquise de Courcelles, also a prisoner there for similar reasons; and between them the nuns, to whom both ladies had taken an uncontrollable dislike, had a hard time of it. Not contented with putting ink into the holy water vase, and filling leaky boxes with water so as to inundate the cells, they frightened the sisters out of their wits by running through the dormitory at night, with a parcel of little dogs at their heels "yelping and howling." Wearied out of their lives, the nuns petitioned that their persecutors

* Subsequently arranged and prepared for publication by the Abbé de Saint-Réal.

might be removed to the Abbey of Chelles, a change not approved of by the duke, who proceeded thither at the head of a company of sixty horsemen for the purpose of carrying off his wife, but was refused admittance by the abbess. At length the parliament thought proper to interfere, and decreed that the duchess should in future inhabit the Hôtel Mazarin, and her husband the Arsenal; the latter, however, appealed against this sentence, and Hortense, fearing the result, determined, by the advice of her brother the Duke of Nevers, to quit Paris, and seek an asylum in Italy with her sister Marie, wife of the Connétable Colonna. Starting one evening in a coach and six, and escorted by the Chevalier de Rohan to the city-gate, she there mounted a horse prepared for her, and, accompanied by one of her waiting-women, both attired as cavaliers, pursued her route without interruption, and arrived safely at Nancy, where she sought and obtained the protection of the Duke of Lorraine (formerly a suitor for the hand of her sister Marie), who gave her an escort of guards as far as Geneva, from whence, after numberless adventures, she eventually reached Milan. Mazarin, meanwhile, informed of her departure, hastened at three o'clock in the morning to the king, and demanded the necessary authority to regain possession of his wife, which was ultimately granted by the parliament; he also accused the Duke of Nevers and the Chevalier de Rohan of having been privy to her flight, summoning the former before the Grande Chambre; but the charge, being unsupported by proof, naturally fell to the ground.

Want of space precludes our dwelling on the successive peregrinations of our errant heroine after her arrival at Milan, where she was affectionately welcomed by her sister, and subsequently rejoined by the Duke of Nevers, then on the point of marriage with Diane de Thianges, niece of Madame de Montespan. A short sojourn with her uncle Cardinal Mancini in Rome, and a few months' stay in the same city with her aunt Martinuzzi, only tended to increase her longing to return to France; and she was easily persuaded to accompany her brother to Nevers, where a disagreeable surprise awaited her, in the shape of a parliamentary decree placing her once more in her husband's power. Nothing daunted, she repaired secretly to Paris, and succeeded in obtaining an interview with the king, who, moved by her solicita-

tions, and possibly not sorry to get rid of her, accorded her a pension of twenty-four thousand livres, commanding her at the same time to return to Rome. A few months later it was rumoured at Versailles that Mesdames de Mazarin and Colonna had quitted Italy together, and had arrived in Provence; and this reported escapade proving to be the fact, the duke, imagining his prey to be within his reach, instantly despatched thither the captain of his guards with orders to arrest her. Hortense, however, having timely warning of his design, took a hasty leave of her sister, and embarked for Savoy, where her old admirer the Duke Charles Emmanuel gladly welcomed her, and installed her in one of his palaces at Turin. There, and in the summer at Chambéry, she was for three years the "admired of all admirers," until, in 1675, the death of the duke and the consequent regency of his widow, induced her to gratify a long-cherished wish, namely, that of visiting England.

The moment was propitious; the court of Charles the Second was then at the zenith of its splendour, and no one was better qualified to adorn it than Hortense de Mazarin. So thought the wits and gallants of the time, by whom her coming was enthusiastically hailed as an additional attraction to the festivities of the "merry monarch," to whose then reigning favourite, the Duchess of Portsmouth, she threatened at one moment to prove a dangerous rival. A house in what is now Pall Mall was prepared for her reception, and a pension of four thousand pounds a year granted her by the king, who is said to have replied to a hint thrown out by M. de Mazarin (who greatly disliked his wife's having money at her disposal), that the receipts given by her were legally of no value, by curtly remarking that as far as he was concerned it mattered little, as he never intended asking for them.

The first years, therefore, of her sojourn in London more than answered her expectations; a welcome guest at Whitehall and in the fashionable circles of the town, she also cultivated and enjoyed the society of the most eminent literary men of the time. Vossius, the learned but sceptical canon of Windsor, Saint-Réal, Waller, and, above all, Saint-Evremond, "with his white locks, little skull-cap, and the great wen on his forehead," who had already resided fourteen years in England, were among her intimates; and nowhere was she happier or more at her ease than

when discussing with them alternately abstruse points of theology, or the last poetical effusion of the day. We are indebted to Saint-Evremond for a graphic portrait of her at this epoch of her career. "She is," says her constant adorer, "a Roman beauty, not a whit resembling your French dolls. The colour of her eyes is indescribable; it is neither blue, nor grey, nor entirely black, but a mixture of all three, combining the tenderness of blue, the piquancy of grey, and the passion of black. Every movement of her mouth has its peculiar charm; when she smiles, its expression, naturally haughty, becomes gentle and winning; the tone of her voice is so touching that one cannot listen to it unmoved. Her complexion is dazzlingly brilliant, and her hair of the softest and most lustrous black. No painter has ever imagined a fairer or more attractive face."

Unfortunately the arrival in London of a certain Morin, who had been uncere-moniously expelled from France on account of some gambling transaction, and had contrived to procure an introduction to the duchess, completely changed the current of her ideas, and inoculated her with a taste or rather mania for the then popular game of basset, which soon became uncontrollable. In vain Saint-Evremond implored her in verse and in prose to check this deplorable propensity; she only laughed, "borrowed his money, which he could ill-afford, and gambled it away besides, which he could but pray her not to do." So little, indeed, did she heed the "qu'en dira-ton," that her house was ere long the resort of all the lovers of basset in the capital, and obtained the unenviable nickname of the "Mazarin bank"; and this state of things continued until a persistent run of ill-luck and want of funds contributed to moderate her ardour, and compelled her—though much against the grain—to resume her ordinary mode of life.

She had nearly attained her fortieth year, when a young Swede, the Baron de Banner, son of Gustavus Adolphus's famous general, came to England, and by his assiduities so aroused the anger of her nephew, the Chevalier de Soissons, then on a visit to her, that a duel ensued between them, in which Banner was mortally wounded, and died a few days later. This catastrophe, to which Madame de Sévigné alludes in one of her letters, saying, "I should never have thought that

a grandmother's eyes were so dangerous,"* so shocked Madame de Mazarin that she closed her house, had her rooms draped with black hangings, and even avowed her intention of retiring into a convent; but suddenly changed her mind on receiving a missive from her husband approving her design, and assuring her that, all circumstances considered, a convent was the best place in the world for her.

While Charles the Second lived, and during the reign of his successor James, her pension had been paid with more or less regularity, but on the accession of William it was reduced by one half; and this diminution of income, together with her ever-increasing debts, threw her affairs into inextricable disorder. On the return to France of her sister, the Duchess of Bouillon, who had been for some time her guest, she would willingly have accom-panied her, but her creditors opposed her departure; and although M. de Mazarin, when he heard of her distress, considerately suggested that she was by no means conscientiously bound to pay them, inasmuch as they were probably all heretics, yet his sympathy went no farther. She had now an opportunity of putting her favourite study, philosophy, into practice, and, being blessed with an elastic temperament, contrived to support the frowns of fortune with tolerable equanimity. Anything, she said, was better than the idea of rejoining her husband. On this head she was inexorable, adopting as her device the old war-cry of the partisans of the Fronde: "Point de Mazarin! point de Mazarin!"

By way of reducing her expenses, she removed in 1692 to Kensington Square, and afterwards to Chelsea, where now stands Paradise Row. There she passed the remainder of her days, enjoying the society of her attached friend Saint-Evremond and of a chosen circle of intimates; and after a short illness, during which she was cheered by the presence of her son and of her sister Marie Anne, breathed her last July 2, 1699, having barely attained her fifty-sixth year. "As soon as the news reached him," says Saint-Simon, "M. de Mazarin, so long separated from her, caused her body (of which he only obtained possession by previously

* Hortense's children were four in number: a son, who became Duke de la Meilleraye, and three daughters, the Marquise de Richelieu, the Abbess du Lys, and the Marquise de Bellefond.

paying her debts) to be brought back to France, had it embalmed, and carried the coffin about with him from place to place for nearly a year. At last he had it deposited by the side of her famous uncle in the church of the College des Quatre Nations, in Paris." The same writer subsequently adds: "He (Mazarin) died in 1712, having survived his wife thirteen years."

HOLLY.

Holly, bright and burnished, in the hedgerows shining,
By bounteous Nature furnished to glad the years declining,
Lest the chill mists spreading wide, over hill and meadow side;
Lest the damp winds moaning lowly, where the dead leaves gather slowly,
Russet, gold, and crimson heaping where the snow-drop-buds are peeping;
Lest the dull incessant rain, plashing on the window-pane,
Found the fair world sinking down into ruth and melancholy,
Nature twined the scarlet crown and bright leaflets of the holly.

Holly, brave and merry, glittering through the frost,
Keen leaf and sparkling berry, o'er feathery snow-drifts tossed,
Calling to the wintry earth, calling to the gay home hearth,
Calling o'er the iron sod the gospel of the new-born God.
Each bright bush with crimson cresting "good tidings of great joy" attesting;
"Good will and peace to all mankind" in every holly garland twined;
Childhood's angel merriment, youth's pure pretty folly,
Heavenly gifts among us sent symbolled in the holly.
Holly, gaily glistening through the Christmas weather;
Perchance kind spirits listening to households met together:
Fathers, mothers, young once more, as children wake the mirth of yore;
Brothers, sisters, joined again in the pause of fret and strain;
While friends, whom time has half estranged, round the holly meet unchanged,
And cold eyes smile, and proud hands press, as memory melts to tenderness;
May, as hope and love unite to cheer life's melancholy,
Whisper in the sweet home light their blessing on the holly.

SOME COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON.

It is some satisfaction—to anyone not employed in the collecting, sorting, or distributing of Her Majesty's mails—that whatever may be the case in other trades there is assuredly no stagnation in the production of Christmas Cards. I thought I had a pretty fair show on my table last year; but frost seems to stimulate the growth of this kind of art-plant, and the present crop is of an abundance which

quite throws that of bygone harvests into remotest shade. And we are advancing, too, not only in quantity but in quality, pictorial and poetic. We are not quite so comic as we were, perhaps. Indeed, the comic element in this year's display is remarkably conspicuous after that too proverbial manner to which I will not more plainly refer. But en revanche we are much less commonplace, not to say twaddling, than we have been wont to be.

The place of honour to Her Majesty's printers. I have never been accustomed to associate the respected names of Eyre and Spottiswoode with anything less serious than an Act of Parliament or a Family Bible at least, and it was rather a shock when their opened parcel suddenly disclosed an avalanche of Christmas Cards. It was still with a certain feeling of awe that I proceeded to their examination, not feeling at all certain that they might not turn out to be a series of elegant extracts from the Statutes at Large or illuminated fragments of codification for the use of the New Law Courts. Could it be possible that this smart young midshipman leaning against the bulwarks of Her Majesty's ship Mistletoe could really be reading a love-letter? or had he—terrible thought!—been just served with a writ? or, worse still, received by some mysterious ocean penny post the bill of costs of Messrs. Screwem and Stickiton in that unlucky case of breach of promise at his last port? Here is a prison too—a picturesqure one certainly—no other than the poetic penitentiary of Chillon. But it is an ominous sequence. It is quite a relief to turn to the third of the series. There is no mistake about that, at all events. It is a summons certainly, and an imperative one. But it runs in the name of a monarch in whose courts we have no hesitation in putting in a prompt and cheerful appearance. The mighty bowl—wherein great apples, or, sibilant, are counterchanged with slices of lemon, proper, natant in a field gales—his fine old heraldic shield; the jewelled ladle its appropriate crest; the clustering sprays of holly and mistletoe its time-honoured supporters; the golden legend at the foot his own lusty old motto, "Wass heil! Drink heil!" There is no need of his majesty's name in those gorgeous golden letters to identify this as the actual official "pasteboard" of good King Christmas; and we can only accept the inevitable conclusion that Saul is indeed among the season's prophets, Her Majesty's printers

veritably disporting themselves in the gay field of Christmas frivolity. And to some purpose too. Here is a little batch that, for delicacy of touch and brightness of conception, might do credit to a press that had dealt with nothing but the little lords and ladies of fairyland for the last hundred years. This dear little Cavalier with the long fair curls and sweeping plume, who has transferred his sword to his left hand while the right is all ready to be held out in friendly greeting, hardly needs the printed message :

Hark, the word by Christmas spoken,
Let the sword of wrath be broken,
Let the wrath of battle cease,
Christmas hath no word but—Peace.

What this funny little shaggy beastie, sitting up "in the attitude of a solicitor" at his young mistress's feet, has been doing or saying, I do not profess to be able to fathom. His young mistress is impressing upon him with uplifted finger that

Fidelity doth friendship best proclaim;
There needs no knighthood to an honest name.

So I am afraid Master Rough, or Tatters, or Booflums Junior, or whatever his name is, has been misbehaving himself, and, perhaps, even entailing the disgrace of an advertisement in the agony column and a visit to the Home for Faithless and Vagabondising Little Reprobates. But if I know anything of the small canine countenance he won't sit quiet on that stool much longer, but in half a minute more will be expressing his penitence after a fashion which may well make more faithful lookers-on a trifle envious of the privilege of penitence. As for this exquisite little woman with the great questioning grey eyes and the bright little thoughtful face, hushing Miss Dolly to sleep under the brilliant canopy of apple-blossom, she is simply one of the smartest and most delicate little gems I have yet seen turned out by a mechanical process. A little rougher in execution and in a bolder key of colouring, but none the less artistic or effective for that, are the set of winter scenes which come next to hand; furred and velveted groups of little lordlings and ladylings, trooping decorously out of church, or gliding in courteous couples over the ice in front of the grand old Elizabethan family mansion. Some of the lines too are good, not merely in comparison with the twaddle which in old times used to be thought good enough for this kind of

thing, but actually in themselves. I like the wholesome ring of this now :

Never mind a touch of frost,
Murky fogs and vapours chasing;
Endless warmth would soon exhaust,
Christmas cold is bright and bracing.
Winter's touch is like the Truth,
Kindest when it seems the sternest,
Useful when the heart of Youth
Comes to brave the world in earnest.

I like the idea, too, of these handsome sets of sailor-boy cards for the special benefit of those who are braving the world in earnest at an age when they can still appreciate a merry message from home. And I don't by any means dislike some of Mr.—or Miss?—Eden Hooper's lines at the back of them. Such as these, for instance :

Fortune, you may blow your roughest,
Hope shall sail the ocean still;
Friendship's built of timber toughest,
They can steer who have the will.
Not too fast and not too blindly,
Looking out for sudden gales;
But to breezes soft and kindly
Ready to unfurl the sails.
If the compass shows us veering
Towards vexation, rage, or spite,
Call all hands to help the steering,
Put her round with all you might.
Put her round if vessels hail us,
Shipwrecked, maybe, or distressed;
Fortune's breeze will surely fail us
If we aid them not our best.

Then we have beautifully executed flower and insect cards: a dragon-fly hovering over a half-opened water-lily; a velvet-winged butterfly fluttering upon a rose or a spray of catkins. Then elaborate landscapes, with cattle trooping slowly homeward at sunset, or deer gliding ghost-like through the moonlit woods; and finally, a highly elaborate series in triptych form, constructed to stand upright on the table, and with exteriors of delicate French grey or palest green beautifully ornamented in darker tracery and gold, and opening to display a highly finished landscape or gay interior with appropriate mottoes on the folding leaves.

Messrs. Sydney J. Saunders and Co.'s little parcel is accompanied by a letter, and one for which I am greatly obliged, for it not only solves a mystery which has been preying on my mind for many years, but opens my eyes to a sign of the times which I confess I have not hitherto properly appreciated. Somebody has been scolding Messrs. Saunders for illustrating Christmas by designs from midsummer, and Messrs. Saunders have been good enough to point out their reason for so doing. And a very

practical reason it is. To the majority of their customers—and I have no doubt of those of all other caterers for Christmas, for they all follow Messrs. Saunders's example in this respect—Christmas comes at Midsummer! Simple, isn't it? and sufficiently obvious, when you come to think of it. But a little startling. Of course we are all prepared to recognise the antipodean theory—as a theory, at all events. Some of us, at least, have had personal experience of a Yule-tide at ninety and odd in the shade, and have "knocked through" on Christmas night as we drained our bumper of carefully iced brandy-pawnee to the health of friends "on the other side." But little experiences of this kind we have always looked upon as experiences. "Fine open weather for Christmas, old fellow!—Not quite so hard a frost as last year!—Not had much skating lately?"—that has been the sort of way in which we have been accustomed to deal with any little temporary aberration of this kind. But to find a Midsummer Christmas actually reckoned upon as a normal institution—a simple everyday commercial fact—that is pushing us from our stools with a vengeance. I am not at all sure that I do not owe Messrs. Sydney Saunders a distinct and decided grudge for the shock thus given to my tenderest and most time-honoured feelings. But, after all, their cards are very pretty, and it is Christmas time, make it winter or summer as you will. So I will smother my just resentment and candidly admire this exquisite bud of *Gloire de Dijon*, just such a one as I remember surreptitiously annexing one Christmas Eve a score of years ago in the Gardens at Cape Town as a seasonable little offering to—never mind whom. This little Greek maiden, with her airy drapery kilted to her delicate little knee, has an appropriately sultry look against the lush vines and the deep blue sky. A very graceful little figure too she is, and very prettily posed. And then comes coolness itself in the long pale-grey card with its delicate black lace border and fairy spray of harebell and quivering quaker-grass; one of the prettiest and most tasteful cards—when once you have accepted that startling topsy-turvy theory—I have yet come across. And here is a dainty little couple in the costume of the old world and the climate of the new, carving their New Year's wishes in the bark of what, I suppose, is a gigantic gum-tree, and evidently commencing in true antipodean fashion at

what we roccoco Podeans should rashly term the wrong end. There is nothing antipodean about this youngster in the smock-frock blowing his walnut-shell boat across the great water-tub to his demure little sister on the other side. But there may be an allegory perhaps here, and it is a taking little picture at all events and capitally done. Most beautifully painted too is this brilliant handful of heaths on their dark-grey ground. And so on with a score or more, all tasteful and all well executed. With well chosen mottoes too for the most part, almost always free from twaddle, and with sometimes a smack of real poetry in them.

And now comes an even more startling surprise. One was prepared to some extent for the antipodean development, but if you have ever received a Christmas Card from a railway company your railway experiences have been of a more genial character than mine. Here, however, is a distinct batch from the Great Eastern, elegantly got up in high-art browns and greens, with just a dash of vermilion here and there to throw up the high lights, and in the middle quaintly mysterious drawings, at first sight apparently of old women and bandit boots, and shoulders of mutton, and that kind of thing, but proving on closer examination, with occasional aid from a magnifying-glass, to be little maps of favoured suburban districts wherein the enterprising senders undertake to deliver Christmas or other parcels at the very moderate rate of fourpence for seven pounds, booking and all charges included. I wish the Great Eastern a wellbeturkeyed Christmas and a hampery New Year.

Mr. Albert Hildersheimer's name also is new to me in connection with Christmas Cards; but if these be his first essays in that line he is to be complimented on an unusually effective start. The first batch I take up is a series of four exquisite little groups of lotus, snowdrop, narcissus, and hawthorn, delicately painted on black and gold ground with all the finish of a water-colour. Next come two large pictures in a wholly different style, but in their way almost equally good; family groups of a hundred and two hundred years ago at their Christmas games of cards. Snowballing and blindman's-buff are the subjects of two somewhat smaller pictures, the former very effective. Then we have two more flower-pieces, a vase of delicate white and purple lilac, and a basket of lilies of the valley, artfully printed with

a thin light streak round the dark ground so as to give the effect of a solid mount. Then two charming bits of wintry woodland ; and last, not least, a round dozen of the dearest little blue and yellow birds that ever chirruped from a fairy tree. Round in every sense, not only the dozen, but the ring in which they snuggle together, and the plump little rascals themselves who chirp and twitter in it. "Tweet ! Tweet ! Tweet !" they carol :

Tweet ! Tweet ! Tweet !
May your Christmas Day be sweet !
God loves us, and God loves you ;
Let us sing and praise him too,
Tweet ! Tweet ! Tweet !

Quite among the prettiest and most tasteful are those of Messrs. Mead and Co. For a shilling each we have a series of most elaborate little silver fans, conleur de rose within, as all things should be at Christmas-tide, and gay with tiny bouquets of summer-flowers or useful with Liliputian almanacks. The best of the sixpenny ones are two long embossed sprays of fuchsia and convolvulus, the former a little too scarlet, but both capitally drawn, and a dear little Greek maiden with a dear little English face just sending off her little Christmas Card under the wing of her dove. Then come two oblong fourpenny cards with embossed groups of wild flowers on a pale grey ground, and a little chubby bird hovering over each. Here is another little gem of a snow-scene, with a saucy little robin fluttering over a sprig of bright holly in the foreground, and behind it a snow-covered village street, with just a gleam of sunset glow beyond, and a troop of schoolboys scurrying homewards—some sliding, some on sledges, one or two on the ground in attitude eminently suggestive of catastrophe. The lightness and delicacy with which this bright little scene is just sketched in with little more than the merest hint of colour are very noteworthy. Similar praise, too, may be awarded to the three naughty chicks, who certainly deserve none on moral grounds, for around the actual fragments of the shells from which they have but this moment emerged they are already vigorously quarrelling over a straw. The three jovial monks over their sumptuous Christmas supper, on the other hand, are as brightly and strongly coloured as these others are delicately touched. I think I remember meeting the Franciscan brother once in the Engadine, and am glad to see that the austerities of subsequent Lents and

Advents have not diminished the rosiness of his cheeks or—other features. And all these and many more of almost equal excellence, including especially a charming little group of corn-flowers, barley, and butterfly, and an artistic small damsel with a robin's-nest, in warm reds on a ground of delicate *café au lait*, Mr. Mead offers us for the still more modest sum of twopence each. The best of the threepenny are, I think, a fine bold holly-branch, with bright berries and snow-laden leaves, on a grey ground ; and a rich dark wreath of wall-flowers, daisies, and forget-me-nots on a ground of almost black olive-green. But the economical, if not the artistic, triumph is in the penny cards. Here is a group of gay-plumaged birdlings fluttering lightly against a background of airy foliage and soft cloud-flecked sky, any one warbler of which would be cheap at double the money. Here is one perched upon the stern of a quaint old barge, and chirping and twittering twenty million merry Christmases and more as he stoops with outspread wing for a flight into the old willow-tree. Here is the very pink and pattern of all dapper little liveried varlets saluting us with doffed hat and proffered bouquet, and here his scarlet-coated huntsman-brother with a dainty little note of Christmas congratulation from—well, her, of course. Here are two Japanese beauties in gay attire, backed by gayer ground of gold—grim, grotesque, gorgeous, and good. Here a French demoiselle and her bonne selecting what must surely be the robe for a golden wedding. Here a cordon-bleu from fairy-land explaining to Mrs. Goose the consolatory excellence of the sauce with which she shall by-and-by be served. A penny each ! I wonder what our grandpas and grandmamas would have thought of the state of British art if they could have had anything of the kind for half-a-crown !

Nor do Messrs. Mead and Co. confine themselves to cards. Here is a whole cargo of crackers, red, blue, green, yellow, and a hundred other shades and combinations, and all gay with quaint picture or ornament, and glorious with transcendent tinsel and glittering glycerine. One tendency I note with something like apprehension in the development of these symptoms of the season. In splendour I suppose no further progress is possible, so they are obliged to go in for increase of bulk. I have a boxful here, each over a couple of feet long. By-and-by, I fancy,

we shall have to hire additional men to pull them.

Messrs. Goodall do not price their specimens of Christmas catering, and I for one should be sorely puzzled to do it for them. Here, for instance, is Mr. Pedagogue Robin about to administer disciplinary correction—called, I remember, in my youthful days by the simple but perhaps equally expressive name of *toko*—to two delinquent young Master Robins, whilst a recklessly incorrigible third is actually preparing to hurl a snowball at his reverend back. I suppose the market price of this will be about a penny. But there is a shillingsworth of fun in it at least. This larger card shows us a lark's nest among the grass, with two dainty little blue moths fluttering over it in evident wonder what sort of monster it will be that shall spring from those gigantic eggs. This brilliant parrot, chattering and chuckling to himself among the gorgeous tropical flowers, might almost do to warm one's hands at, if a mere glance at the blazing fire which follows, and round which the merry Christmas party of crickets are holding their Yule-tide revels, does not put us beyond need of any such comforting. This quaint little girl in the scanty black and grey drapery warming her hands at the elegant bronze tripod, which has somehow found its way into a snowy English landscape, puzzles me. I half think she must be a fairy godmother. But there is no string to pull, and she don't seem disposed to change without. Here are a charming little couple, staggering gaily along under the weight of a huge basket of beautifully executed wild-flowers. Here two gorgeous groups of bright-plumaged water-birds, somewhat out of reach, I confess, of my powers of ornithological classification. I know this splendid old mallard though, shaking his bronze-green head among the withered flags on the frost-bound marsh, and have seen worse pictures of him, too, framed and hung up on drawing-room walls. But the best of all Messrs. Goodall's contribution I think are the two plain brown cards, one with a bunch of white and yellow azaleas, the other with a bright pink spray of cyclamen. Very unpretending, both of them, but real works of art.

And now I must growl a little. I don't feel hypercritical at Christmas-time, but I suppose it is necessary to draw that proverbial line somewhere, and I think we

may draw it on this occasion at a knife and fork and a pair of nutcrackers. Capital things in their way, no doubt, and seasonable withal, which is something, at all events; but as a delicate effort of the imagination for the decoration of a Christmas Card I decline to accept them at any price. This very sulky-looking young lady, too, in the tight pink body. She has a right to be sulky, no doubt, if ever an absolute ill-fit can confer that doubtful privilege upon a young woman not sufficiently well-favoured by nature to dispense with the adventitious aid of the dressmaker's art. And her grievance is anything but lessened by the sense that her toilet deficiencies are thrown into needlessly bold relief by the golden background against which she stands. But we didn't make her gown, and why should she come and turn our very punch sour by her vinegary looks on account of it? As for this little hunting-scene, if my temper had not been upset by the young woman in pink, I daresay I should not have found much fault with it, for it is a pretty little scene enough; and if people don't commonly hunt in deep snow, why, pictorially speaking, so much the worse, for the snow makes a capital contrast for the pink. But when it comes to Reynard carrying off a fat goose in his flight, and a huntsman and field going after him, *solum cum solis*, on the principle of the Gallic champion of *le sport*, who did not indeed know whether he could catch a fox, but was quite prepared to try without any aid from the pack, then I feel that, under existing circumstances of foregone aggravation, that inevitable line must certainly be drawn again. What business too has this naughty little girl with the very sketchy head of hair to be pulling down that vine for her lamb to feed on? And in which of heaven's courts did this very pink-winged angel acquire the extremely affected air with which she is fingering that three-stringed barometer? And oh, above all, what, as we say at forfeit time, should be done to the owner—or perpetrator—of this "very pretty thing" in mottoes:

A blythe and jolly Christmas,
A merry Christmas dear;
Oh, a merry, merry Christmas!
And a fair New Year?

There! I feel better, and can turn once more in a proper Christmas spirit to the ingenious novelties of Messrs. Dean and Son. The publishers of all those wonderful mechanical toy-books, with leaves made

expressly to be dog-eared, and pictures that won't stand still to be looked at, and a general topsy-turviness and insideoutness and t'otherwayroundness of arrangement eminently in harmony with pantomime-time, are bound to have something different from their rivals, and have achieved it this season in the shape of, firstly, an effective little set of embossed flower-groups with the ground altogether absent; and secondly, a very tasteful series of long cards in pale greens and drabs with gracefully-designed embossed sprays of flowers of various kinds in sepia. The former are quaint, and would mount well, I fancy, on silk or satin. The latter, though not so showy as most, are in their way very taking.

Messrs. Rimmel as usual are not content with appealing to the eye, but devote their energies to leading the public by the nose. Some of their more ordinary cards are very pretty, notably a most brilliant little cardlet with a whole bunch of roses in what looks like, but I suppose hardly can be, floss-silk on rice-paper, quite unlike any of my specimens from elsewhere. But their specialty is of course to be looked for in their scented sachets, and very tasteful some of these are. Not quite so elaborate, perhaps, as one or two of Messrs. Mead and Son's, one of which, glittering with silver and gimp and white satin and pearls, gay within and without with lovely embossed bouquets and enclosing in its inmost recesses a marvellous white wreath of some mysterious fairy fabric quite beyond my mortal power to name, is one of the most gorgeous things of the kind I have seen; whilst its companion, a gay-plumaged little bird nestling in a fairy bower of the same delicate material, is not only gorgeous but really very pretty and tasteful. In their smaller way, however, Messrs. Rimmel's sachets are some of them very good. Here, especially, is one with a capital group of poppies and cornflowers on a delicate blue-green ground; another with a charming little group of pink heather surrounded by a lightly traced border of pale green and gold. Here, too, are some gaily printed little almanacks; one especially for musical people, with effective monochrome portraits in several shades of blue on a gold ground of Palestrina, Handel, and other composers. Indeed, of calendars I have an endless variety, the most noticeable perhaps being the tiny little watch-pocket volume of Messrs. Goodall; a large sheet card of the same firm, with a gorgeous border composed of all the flowers of spring,

summer, and autumn; a rather smaller but very tasteful one called the *Calendar of Sports*; and a quaint sepia study of convolvulus by Messrs. Willis and Co. These two latter firms, moreover, send me each a couple of packs of playing-cards, all of new and effective patterns; one of Messrs. Goodall's being of the ordinary form with a very artistic back of small blue flowers and long olive-like leaves, while the other, with a very spirited little Cupid in full flight, is smaller in size and with the rounded corners and marked values of the new American type. Messrs. Willis's are both of the English pattern; one with a well drawn Pompeian female figure in pale yellow drapery on a dark ground, the other with a noble array of splendid ripe apples on a ground of burnished gold. The latter firm, too, display their fancy in some very pretty little floral menus and ball programmes, eminently à propos of the season.

But I think the palm of Christmas Card production falls again this year, as last, to Messrs. Marcus Ward and Co. The Queen's Printers run them hard no doubt, and so do Messrs. Saunders. But, on the whole, and especially in respect of the higher-class cards, I am inclined to assign the first place to Messrs. Ward. Here, for instance, is a particularly bright little fancy in the shape of a beautifully-painted butterfly that, on cleverly pulling two little cardslips on each side, flutters its pencilled wings in the most perfectly life-like manner over this half-opened bloom of yellow rose. Here again is a delicate little Watteau series; here an admirably rendered bit from an old master; here a delicate wreath of flower or foliage framing the score of a Christmas carol. Here again is the very pearl of sachets, with the most exquisite marquis on the one side and the most delightful marquise on the other; here a mediæval triptych, sober externally in solemn brown and scarlet, within ablaze with conventional flowers and fruit in all the quaintest tints of the artistic rainbow. Anon we come to a bit of Leicestershire, with a real huntsman negotiating an undeniable oxer at the tail of a pack of veritable hounds; followed—the picture, not the hounds—by a couple of quaint old-world interiors, round mirrors, blue china, and all complete. Here is a specimen text-card, exquisitely illuminated and duly provided with a neat little gold ring for hanging at the bed-head; and here, finally, are a couple

of absolute curiosities in the card line, one the counterfeit presentation of a quaint old Indian cabinet, appropriately backed by a gorgeous dragon-screen and a huge blue jar of white chrysanthemums, and every here and there an odd little pair of doors opening irresponsibly in some unexpected corner and displaying fresh treasures within. The other as absolute a labyrinth of traps as a stage at pantomime time, with a little door on one side apparently for the admission of the sender's photograph, and four or five little doors on the other, each opening as it were out of each, and disclosing quaint little child-groups, in blue monochrome, at work and at play in half-a-dozen fantastic fashions.

And so I come to my last Christmas oddity of all. A whole pack of cards this time, and odd cards every one of them. Not comic, mark you! Nothing so vulgar as that; simply odd in the sense of unmatchedness, and many of the designs of a really exquisite taste. But to each card a separate and distinct design. Well, the idea has its advantages, and when Mr. Merriman is applauded for bonneting the policeman, bringing a tribe of old ladies to the ground on a butter-slide, and pocketing a goose or two, a couple of rounds of beef, half-a-dozen codfish, and a string of sausages, I may perhaps be forgiven for studying the backs of the cards in my adversary's hand. And as for the convenience of knowing under such circumstances that these two dear little Packs are careering through space on butterflies on the back of the deuce of diamonds; that this gem of a Cupidon as he scatters his cards on the rose-pink air turns his winged side upon the five of hearts; that this delicate bunch of mistletoe is the appropriate backing of the knave of the same suit; and that the lion and the unicorn are fighting for the crown actually worn by the king of clubs, there can be no question about that. There is no name upon the packet, so I cannot say to whom we are indebted for this ingenious device. Possibly it, too, is the production of some antipodean caterer for a Christmas in which things in general are as topsy-turvyish as the seasons themselves. Anyway, I notice here one distinct and most moral gain in it. Played with packs of this description, no game of cards—not Van John, nor unlimited Loo, nor Nap, nor even Poker itself—can fairly come under the stigma of gambling. And this is one triumph at least for the Christmas Card Season of 1879.

THE "PUZZLE" MANIA.

WITHIN the last few years a notable innovation has been introduced into several of our weekly journals, and from its evident attraction for their readers bids fair to become a permanent institution. This perfectly harmless and highly-relished appendage to the contents of the papers in question has long since passed successfully through its experimental stage, and is now a recognised and prominent feature, enthroned in its special column, and anxiously sought after on the day of publication—possibly to the detriment of the other articles—by the "mille etre" enthusiastic votaries of the "puzzle" mania.

Since the outbreak of this popular disorder, every male and female subscriber—more especially the latter—has merged his or her individuality into that of a would-be Oedipus, and has voluntarily undergone an amount of brain-cudgelling incomprehensible to the uninitiated, but clearly as congenial to the fair sex as a robe en cuirasse or a six-and-a-quarter Jouvin. Not only are their own divining powers sorely exercised by the process; those of their friends and acquaintances are also in constant requisition. "Light, more light," exclaimed Goethe on his death-bed; and a similar request, forwarded by post and telegraph with a reckless disregard of expense, is perpetually on the wing from one part of the kingdom to another, less, perhaps, to the satisfaction of the recipient than to the financial improvement of that branch of the revenue presided over by Lord John Manners. Whether the lights thus derived, being mostly contradictory, are of any great advantage to the enquirer is a matter for his or her consideration; we are inclined to fancy that, particularly as regards the specialty of acrostics, they are more apt to create confusion worse confounded than to supply any definite solution of the point at issue. These same acrostics, which, by-the-way, still maintain an unquestionable supremacy over every other kind of puzzle, are, it seems to our inexperienced mind, hard nuts to crack; and admitting, as they occasionally do, of divers possible interpretations artfully suggested as baits by the ingenious inventor, fully justify the guessers, who are generally at their wits' end before they have mastered "light" number one, in soliciting the co-operation of more expert auxiliaries, and taking their "bien," like Molière, "où ils le trouvent."

Another variety of the species, scarcely inferior in popularity to the foregoing, and recommending itself by a constant change of subject to a still larger circle of adherents, is that which, for want of a more appropriate designation, we venture to term the "omnibus puzzle;" the topics proposed for the competitive exercise of mental ingenuity being of so diversified a nature as to suit all parties in turn. Now they are called upon to exhibit their poetical capabilities in the production of an epigram or a conundrum, or in the composition of four lines in which the introduction of the words "ippecacuanha" and "cauliflower" is obligatory; now to fill up the hiatus of bouts rimés, or—for all ages are impartially invited to play their part in the tournament—to furnish specimens of original baby-sayings and nursery-rhymes. When it is judged advisable to vary the entertainment, a list of books for a yacht voyage, a tempting bill of fare for the dinner-table, or some other subject of practical utility is substituted; the prize accorded to the successful competitor being two guineas, except in cases where the merits of two candidates are so equally balanced as to induce the "puzzle editor" to divide the honorarium between them.

As may naturally be supposed, answers good and otherwise, all of which are duly acknowledged in a column set apart for the purpose, and not a few quoted in extenso, form a weekly total sufficient to drive the unfortunate postmen charged with their delivery to the verge of despair, and horribly to embarrass the examining jury; and we can fancy the entire staff of the journal sitting with rueful countenances in committee, and engaged in deciphering the shoal of manuscripts, bearing for signature pseudonyms the singular choice of which we shall come to presently, and at once ruthlessly consigning two-thirds of them without further ceremony to the waste-paper basket. And it may here be parenthetically observed that, whichever composition is selected as worthy of the prize, the only person satisfied with the editorial decision is the fortunate winner; the correctness of the verdict being as a matter of course disputed and vilified by the unsuccessful candidates, some of whom even go so far as to air their supposed grievance by a correspondence not always remarkable on their side for amenity.

Parodies of popular poets and prose-writers on current topics of the day are

among the most recent attractions held forth by the propagators of the puzzle mania, and several very excellent specimens have already appeared; the task, however, is too arduous for the ordinary run of amateur brethren of the craft, and the replies are consequently less numerous than in other specialties of the kind. The same objection by no means holds good in the case of the last novelty inaugurated by a sporting journal, the fulfilment of the prescribed conditions being strictly within the compass of every diligent student of Ruff's Guide and the Racing Calendar—namely, the offer of a prize of two or three guineas to the individual who shall have named beforehand the greatest number of winning horses at the different race meetings of the week. This luminous idea, perfectly in accordance with the equine propensities of our metropolitan population, appears to have been a decided hit; and, judging from the ingenuity hitherto displayed by many of the correspondents, it is clear that they have nothing in common with the verdant hue of the paper appropriately chosen by the proprietors of the journal.

Another very amusing specialty, the only one to our knowledge to which no pecuniary reward is attached, has long been a leading feature in one of our fashionable periodicals; we allude to "hard cases," where some luckless individual is supposed to be placed in an awkward or embarrassing position, and correspondents are politely requested to get him out of it. The usual formula is something in this style: "A., by nature a domestic Othello, discovers B., a former admirer of his wife previous to her marriage, tête-à-tête with Mrs. A. in her boudoir, and kicks him downstairs. What should Mr. B. do?" Underneath follow the answers, judged correct or incorrect according to editorial fiat, and generally affording some insight into the character of the writer; for instance: "Punch A.'s head" (Bellicosus); "Call the police" (Aspen Leaf); "Bring an action" (Lincoln's Inn); "Grin and bear it" (Diogenes), &c., &c.; although the pseudonyms given fall far short in oddity of those commonly appended. We have conscientiously gone through the lists of names adopted by the correspondents of the different puzzle editors, and extract therefrom for the edification of our readers the subjoined textual selection, merely premising that hundreds of others equally euphonious remain unquoted: Verrie

Sorrie, Crede Cornu, Phoscophornio, High Jinks, Kamming-diggle, Shrew Mouse and Co., Tumble-down Dick, 'Arry Repressed, Londonderry Katlappers, Swaggs-waggs, The Fakenham Ghost, Two Essex Calves, Stewed Prunes, Bumble-puppy, and Tommy up a Pear-tree.

The interest created on their first appearance by the "French puzzles" has of late singularly diminished; the replies having gradually dwindled down from upwards of five hundred to scarcely a fifth part of their original number. This falling off would seem partly attributable to the rather abstruse nature of the questions proposed, demanding perhaps a more intimate acquaintance with the subtleties of the language than even Frenchmen as a rule are apt to possess, and partly to the amount of research necessary for their solution. We have heard of a lady, an enthusiastic admirer of these literary gymnastics, who in the course of six months had disbursed no less than thirty pounds in the purchase of books of reference with a view of improving her position in the contest, and attaining the much-coveted total of ten marks at the end of the week; but even if the result of this outlay had answered her expectations—which by all accounts it did not—it must be owned that, taking into consideration the comparatively trifling value of the quarterly prize, her investment would have been under any circumstances in direct contradiction to the old saying, "Set a sprat to catch a herring;" her reading of the proverb having evidently been, "Set a herring to catch a sprat." Some months back a very hard struggle between two or three candidates terminated in the victory of the pseudonym "Sloane Park and Co.," the bearer of which turned out to be the widow of an English physician long resident in Paris; and on another occasion the second prize fell to the lot of a fair inhabitant (English born, of course) of Frankfort on the Main. How, in that eminently prosaic and practical city, she could have contrived to pick up her knowledge of idiomatic French was and always will be a mystery to us; but we hope that in her capacity of Hausfrau she turned a deaf ear to the fallacious seductions of Hamburg lotteries, and prudently reserved her two guineas for the more profitable adornment of the family Christmas-tree.

It will be seen from the foregoing specimens that, with the exception of the solitary instance just mentioned, the puzzle

mania shows no present symptom, either on the part of the journals or on that of their contributors, of going out of fashion; on the contrary, it has of late spread so rapidly that even the cheapest and most ephemeral ventures are compelled in self-defence to include in their programme some special attraction of the kind. The only fear is that in course of time the incessant demand for novelty may render it impossible for the majority of the competitors to keep pace with the requirements of the public, with whom "de plus fort en plus fort, comme chez Nicolet" already appears to have become a *sine quâ non*. The quarterly prizes, except in the case of the acrostics, and even they are mostly supplemented by yearly ones, are completely thrown into the shade by the more enticing bait of two guineas a week; and the greater the variety of the subjects proposed, the more people seem to relish them. We own to have occasionally yielded to the temptation, and to have tried our hands successively, though as yet not successfully, at epigram, bouts rimés, and even French puzzles; consoling ourselves for our failure by calling to mind the golden maxim, "Finch' è fato, vi è speranza," and the not less encouraging bit of philosophy inculcated by Jacob Faithful's sententious parent, "Better luck next time!"

MY RUSSIAN FRIEND.

"Eh, eh, what does it signify? Nihilists, or Reds of the old sort, my young friend, are very much birds of a feather. Bah! they reproduce themselves, these revolutionists. Our Russian Pestal, look you, Monsieur Lesly, and the German, Sand, were just such hotheads as we have to-day. A quoi bon? Will they hinder me from classifying my Cypride, or completing my collection of reptiles! Hardly, I think. Well, mon cher, with your permission, I shall adjourn to my study, and leave Helena here to entertain you in my absence."

And so saying, the old count, in his Turkish slippers and velvet skull-cap, and the long brown coat which in private life he always wore, but of which the button-holes were garnished with the ribbons of the proudest orders in the Czar's gift, shuffled off to the solitary room in which, surrounded by illustrated books, glass cases full of stuffed fish and dried lizards, and carefully docketed correspondence from learned

societies, he spent the most of his waking hours, indifferent to modern politics and court intrigues. Helena and I were left alone. There were not wanting, among the gossips of Moscow, those who wondered that a Russian noble of such rank and lineage as Count Alexis Demidoff should have sanctioned the betrothal of his only daughter to a plain untitled Englishman like myself, whose family had for two generations past been members of the English mercantile colony at St. Petersburg.

Some service, rendered by my father to the count, then a young diplomatist of extravagant habits and impaired fortune, had laid the foundation of an enduring friendship, and had probably caused my proposals for Helena's hand to meet with a favourable reception. On this particular day I thought that my fair fiancée looked sad and troubled, although her father, the most unobservant of men, seemed not to have noticed the unwonted air of anxiety which clouded his daughter's beautiful face. Scarcely had the door closed before Helena rose from her chair and approached me, saying, in a low hurried voice: "Harold, I am unhappy—wretched. It is all for my brother's sake—for dear Ivan's."

I had guessed as much, from the moment when she began to speak. Rumours had reached my ears, and, although club-talk in Russia is even more misleading than in London, there is seldom smoke without fire; and I could readily believe the report that my future brother-in-law was implicated in the far-stretching web of the Nihilist conspiracy. Ivan himself was a frank, bold lad, with more heart than brains, and precisely of the stamp of character upon which the more wily wire-pullers concerned in the plot prefer to work. He had enough of chivalry to be indignant with the corruption and tyranny around him, without the prudence necessary to arm him against dangerous counsels and compromising associates.

"He is in peril—great peril!" said Helena, in a cautious, but earnest tone. "He has been drawn on, somehow, into the conspiracy, and his name is in a list which some traitor has sold to the imperial authorities. To-day, or to-morrow, the order for his arrest will reach the governor of Moscow. Ivan is in hiding, but the police, like the Nihilists, have their agents everywhere. And if the place of his retreat be discovered, his doom will be—" For a moment she hesitated, and then whispered, "Siberia—or death!"

I was half incredulous. Although I had spent most of my life in Russia, and knew the language and the country well, so well that I was often myself mistaken for a Russian, some sturdy English instinct made me almost unable to believe that such heavy retribution could await any act of which my young friend Ivan was capable. He had listened to designing advisers, and had probably made rash speeches and penned imprudent letters, but I was sure that political assassinations would be as repugnant to him as to myself, while I was confident that his family name and influence would procure him lenient treatment should he be captured. But I could not persuade Helena to take this hopeful view of the case. "You are an Englishman, dear Harold," she said, half-sadly, as she bent her dark eyes upon my face, "and you cannot reason on these things, or rather divine them, as we Russians can, who from our cradles have breathed an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. There are spies in this very house, servants who are paid to make a daily report to the police prefect of any unguarded word they can surprise. The only one beneath this roof who suspects nothing, heeds nothing, is my father. Poor dear papa has been so busy with his science that he regards as trifles all the topics which now divide Russia into two hostile camps; and, were Ivan taken, they would be very harsh with him, just because he belongs to the old territorial nobility, so few of whom have joined this plot. He would be looked on as a deserter as well as a rebel, whereas, if he could once leave Russia—Oh, save him, Harold, you who are so clever, and in whose advice he would trust, at any cost save him!"

"At any cost!" I repeated, half mechanically, for my mind was busy, and for the first time I began to realise the position of the young count.

"Yes, at any cost!" exclaimed Helena eagerly. "You know how I love my brother—poor, rash boy—there are but two of us, and he has been so good and gentle with me from our childish days till now. His death or exile would be very bitter to me!" And, as she spoke, her beautiful eyes were dimmed by tears.

"I have been thinking," said I, after a pause, "how best I can serve your brother, Helena love, and I rejoice to say that I am able to be of real use. Here is my English passport, granted at our embassy in St. Petersburg and backed by all the necessary

official visas, in preparation for the journey to London which I am to take in ten days time. Ivan talks English fluently. Armed with this document, he can easily cross the frontier, and—”

At this moment the clank of spurs and sabres, mingling with the tread of heavy feet ascending the grand staircase, caught my ear. Mademoiselle Demidoff, too, started and grew pale. “Hide the passport!” I said hurriedly, and scarcely had the folded oblong of stamped paper been thrust beneath the silken cushions of the sofa, before a demure-looking serving-man in the count’s livery threw open the door to give admission to seven or eight gendarmes and police-agents, headed by two officers in uniform, one of whom, whose breast was covered with medals and crosses, I recognised as Colonel Obriavin, the military chief of the Moscow police.

“Excuse this intrusion!” said the colonel, with a cold and formal courtesy that matched well with his stern features. “Ours is no pleasant errand, but duty exacts that we should perform it. I arrest you, Count Ivan, in the emperor’s name for the crime of high treason, and here is the warrant.”

As the chief of the police spoke, he produced a thin sheet of blue official paper, stamped with the black eagle of Holy Russia, and elaborately signed and countersigned in red ink and black ink; not by any means the sort of document that any man who loved the sweets of liberty would wish to have intruded on his notice. As he did so, two policemen glided round and posted themselves behind me, so as to be ready, no doubt, to pinion my arms in the event of my being rash enough to attempt resistance or flight. I did not, in this emergency, lose my presence of mind. Rapidly I reflected that this blunder on the part of the local authorities might be the salvation of the real Ivan. Helena’s brother, I remembered, had for years past paid but brief visits to Moscow, preferring, as most young men of his age and class are apt to do, cosmopolitan St. Petersburg to the ultra-Russian manners of the gloomy old Muscovite capital that clusters round the Kremlin. He and I were much alike, as to years, height, and features, and this fortunate mistake would enable him to get beyond the limits of the Czar’s jurisdiction before it was discovered.

I played my part, I believe, very creditably, doing my best to appear thunderstruck, and then rallying my latent energies

to assure Colonel Obriavin that, although innocent, I was quite at the service of the imperial functionaries, and would follow him, into the presence of my judges, if necessary, without an instant’s delay.

“You will see your judges quite soon enough, young sir!” returned the chief of the police gloomily, but, as I fancied, with a strange sort of pity in his look and tone. “Remove the prisoner!” he added, in gruffer accents, and in a moment my arms were pinioned to my sides, and I was hustled out of the room and down the stairs, closely surrounded by the police. I could hear Helena, her fears for her brother overpowered by her apprehensions for my safety, crying aloud that my captors were mistaken, that I was a foreigner, an Englishman, and no subject of the Czar, but no one seemed to pay the slightest attention to what she said, and presently her voice died away in a low wailing cry, and I knew that she had fainted. As for myself, I was half pushed, half borne along, down the grand staircase and across the spacious entrance-hall, unaccountably deserted now by the lazy servants in the Demidoff livery who usually lounged away their time there, until I reached the outer door, before which stood a plain dark carriage drawn by two horses. Into this, accompanied by the two officers and a police-agent, I was thrust, while a gendarme, a cocked carbine in his hand, mounted the box, and seated himself beside the coachman.

“We wished to spare your father’s feelings the ignominy of a public arrest,” said Colonel Obriavin curtly, as the carriage rolled rapidly away. “I must, however, warn you,” he added, as he drew forth a revolver and heedfully examined its charged chambers, “that the first attempt to give the password, or provoke a rescue, will be fraught with fatal consequences to yourself.”

I muttered something inarticulate by way of a reply, and leaned back, with half-closed eyes, in my corner of the vehicle. The password! And it was thought that I, alone with five enemies, might still be able to turn the tables by uttering some cabalistic phrase, if not deterred by threats of immediate death. For how dangerous a conspirator did they take me, or, rather, to how dangerous a conspiracy was I supposed to be affiliated, when it was implied that by a word, a signal, I could summon assistance from among the loitering groups that thronged the market-

place or the busy stream of foot-passengers in the streets! Presently, however, we were far from the more busy and populous parts of Moscow, and traversing a thinly inhabited and straggling suburb where the frock-coat and cylindrical hat of western civilisation seemed unknown, and caftans, fur caps, and boots of greasy sheepskin, or Jewish gaberdines, were worn by the few denizens of that ill-favoured locality. At last the carriage halted at the door of a large building, before the front of which a sentry was slowly pacing, while half a score of Cossack irregulars sat in their Tartar saddles, or stood beside their shaggy little horses, as if waiting for orders. It needed but one glance at the darkling façade of the edifice, its windows coated with dust and cobwebs, and guarded by massive bars of rusty iron, and the high blank walls that flanked it, to be aware of the purpose for which it was designed. Then for the first time, as I entered the sad portals of the prison, and heard the sullen clash of the weighty door and the rattling of the massive bolts, a chill, as of fear, ran through me, and I began to doubt whether I had been altogether prudent in assuming the character with which I was now identified. It was too late, however, to draw back, and I consoled myself by remembering that, thanks to my impersonation, and to his sister's timely warning, the young Count Ivan would soon be beyond the reach of Russian despotism. And, after all, they could scarcely venture to harm an Englishman.

I had plenty of time to take what comfort I could from the Foreign Office theory of the *Civis Romanus* as applied to British subjects, since for four weary days I was left to the undisturbed occupancy of my cell, my solitude being only interrupted by the periodical arrival of the gaoler with food, and the more irregular visits of a colony of sportive rats. Now and then, by night, there would recur strange noises in the prison, the tramp of heavy feet, the clank of musket-butts on the stone floor, the clatter of chains, and, once or twice, groans as of someone in pain, smothered by a din of loud voices and clinking sabres. And I could not but recollect how it was whispered that harsh and barbarous severities, unsanctioned by law, were yet practised in Russian prisons, with the connivance, if not by the command, of the imperial authorities.

"Come before the grand duke. He will take your case the first, it seems,"

said a hoarse voice, as the gleam of a lantern was suddenly flung upon my face while I lay sleeping on my straw pallet. It was the chief gaoler who spoke, and he was accompanied by his subordinates, and by two Cossack soldiers, who stood scowling in the doorway, carbine in hand. Two minutes later I was led into a room, at the door of which a picquet of grenadiers was posted, and in which, surrounded by a group of staff officers, was the prince of the imperial family who it seemed was to be my judge. He was, like most of the reigning family of Romanoff, a tall man, with prominent features, and an air of command that suited well with his rich uniform and waving plumes. I was not prepared, however, for the vehemence with which he accosted me, stepping forward, as he did so, and touching me lightly on the breast with the forefinger of his extended hand.

"I am sorry, young sir," he said rapidly, but bitterly, "to see your father's son thus—as a criminal come to receive sentence, a culprit to hear his doom. Yes, yes," he continued, raising his voice as I attempted to speak, "I know what you would say; but, let me tell you, no specious plea of innocence will avail you now. We have proofs"—and he pointed towards a heap of papers that lay on the green-covered table—"by which your life is triply forfeited. I am resolved—the emperor is resolved—that this plague-spot of disaffection shall be cut out at all costs. One chance you have, and that is—" and here the grand duke turned towards the other officers, one of whom, a grey-haired colonel, read out from a paper these words: "A full and frank confession, which shall place at the disposal of our august lord the Czar the chief conspirators of the detestable association which—"

"In short, denounce your miserable associates, and your life will be spared," broke in the prince impatiently. "You refuse?" he exclaimed, in a high, shrill voice. "Then take the consequences."

"Your highness," I began, hesitatingly, "will allow me to explain—"

"His blood be on his own head then!" said the grand duke roughly, as he turned his back. "We must make an example." And before I had time to renew my remonstrance, I was dragged away.

Harriedly I was reconducted along the mildewed corridors of the prison, thrust into my cell, and locked in, without a word to intimate what was to be my fate—

whether instant execution or Siberia. The prince's words had pointed to the former, rather than the latter, of these alternatives; but as hours and days went by, and the regular routine of my prison life remained unchanged, I began to think that I had been forgotten, and that months or years might elapse before the sentence of banishment to Asia should be carried into effect. It was in vain that I questioned my warder, or even his superior, the gaoler-in-chief, and as fruitless was my request for an interview with some officer or civilian of rank. Those who had the charge of me merely shook their heads, with a conventional, "What would you, Batuscha? Is it not the emperor's will;" and nothing occurred to break the monotony of my imprisonment until, one misty autumn morning, an hour after day-break, I was led out to the cavalry exercising ground hard by, there to be shot, "The emperor's gracious consent having been obtained" to that method of terminating my captivity. The gruff and grey-headed lieutenant in command of the escort declined, with soldierly bluntness, to entertain my assurance that I was an Englishman, and no Russian, nor in anyway guilty.

"Bah! young count," he said, tightening his sword-belt. "The game is lost, and it is better to pay the stakes without a grimace. I've seen lads younger than you front the platoon-fire without blinking, ten at a time, when I served in the Caucasus."

A few minutes later, and I found myself, with bandaged eyes, kneeling on the ground close to an open grave, at the edge of which some sawdust had been freshly strewn. Thirty yards off stood the firing party, with ordered arms, awaiting the word, while hard by stood a group of officers, wrapped in their cloaks, and chatting as they smoked their cigars. None of these had consented to listen to my protestations, but, as I knelt, a papas of the Russo-Greek Church bent over me, whispering the consolations of the national creed; then pressing what was no doubt a picture of the Panagia to my passive lips, withdrew. I could hear the rattle of the firelocks as the soldiers prepared for the fatal volley.

Suddenly there fell upon my dulled ear the tramp of a horse. Yes; the quick hoof-strokes came nearer and nearer at a

furious gallop, and mingled with the clatter of military accoutrements. Almost immediately afterwards there was a shout, and another, and then the words reached me: "Ground arms, men! It is a pardon—a reprieve!" And next I must have fainted, for all grew black and indistinct, and when I recovered consciousness it was to find that the bandage had been removed from my eyes, and that my head was propped by the knee of a flat-capped grenadier, while the regimental surgeon, bending over me, was wiping the lancet with which he had bled me. "He'll do very well now!" said the doctor, as he saw my eyes unclose, while the officers crowded round me, congratulating me, in hearty fashion, on the very narrow escape which I had had. What had saved me was a telegram from the young Count Ivan, then safe and sound across the Austrian frontier; and a mounted orderly despatched by the governor of Moscow had arrived but just in time to prevent my rash impersonation of Helena's brother from ending tragically.

Helena is now my wife, and Ivan Demidoff, whose father, the old count, died two years since, has long since made his submission to the imperial court, and resides with us here in England, while year after year his neglected estates, now under skilled management, increase in value; nor does my brother-in-law seem by any means inclined to repeat the follies of his hot youth by sharing in the further plots of that formidable society of which he has ceased to be a member.

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